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TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Meagan Tuttle, AICP, Director
DATE: July 21, 2022
RE: UVM Presentation of Trinity Campus Plans

Background

In December 2021, Mayor Weinberger announced the ["10 Point Housing Action Plan"](#) to serve as a roadmap with two main goals: to double the rate of housing production within the city over the next 5 years, and end chronic homelessness in Burlington. The action plan includes a number of financial investments, resource expansion, and zoning policy changes to achieve these goals. The plan continues to build on nearly a decade of work to address housing availability and affordability—including many policy reforms the Planning Commission has previously been engaged in. In particular, the plan builds on and expands objectives from the 2015 Housing Action Plan and the 2019 Housing Summit.

The 2021 plan identifies three major zoning policy amendments to support its overarching goals, including "opening new on-campus University of Vermont (UVM) student housing opportunities by rezoning the former Trinity Campus to reduce UVM's pressure on the housing market."

Reviewing the applicability of the Trinity Campus overlay zoning district for this part of UVM's campus has been discussed periodically in recent years. [planBTV: Comprehensive Plan](#), updated in 2019, identifies the institutions' campuses and the major thoroughfares that function as the city's eastern gateways as [special growth areas](#). *planBTV* states that these areas are an essential focus for the growth of the institutions within their campuses, particularly to create new and additional housing options for students. *planBTV* also notes this area of campus as being important to help "better balance on-campus housing opportunities between the north and south of the core academic areas of campus."

Existing Trinity Campus Overlay Zoning District

The *Burlington Comprehensive Development Ordinance (CDO)* includes five Institutional Core Campus Overlay Districts, which apply to sub areas of the Institutional zoning district. These overlay districts are intended to provide for growth within the core of the institutions' campuses, by allowing an increased development intensity than would typically be found in the underlying zoning district, and providing transitions between sections of campus and the surrounding neighborhoods.

The UVM Trinity Campus (UVMT) overlay zone applies to a parcel on UVM's campus along Colchester Avenue on the north side of the intersection of Colchester and East Avenues. A map of the current Institutional Core Campus Overlay zones, and the existing *CDO* standards that apply to this part of campus are attached to this memo.

The parcel is currently home to a number of UVM [residence halls](#) such as McAuley and Mercy Halls. UVM intends to create additional graduate and undergraduate beds in the vicinity of these existing residence halls, and has identified a number of limitations under the current UVMT overlay zone.

Work to Date

The request to amend the *CDO* was submitted by UVM to the City Council in January, 2022, and to the Planning Commission in February, 2022. Over the subsequent months, staff and UVM officials have attended or facilitated five public engagement opportunities, in addition to three Planning Commission meetings:

- Feb. Ward 1/8 NPA – Focus on UVM Campus Planning & Enrollment

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- Mar. Ward 1/8 NPA- Q&A on Housing Issues with Ward 1/8 PC Members
- May Ward 1/8 NPA- Focus on City Housing Plans & Policies, including near-campus neighborhoods
- May Planning Commission Meeting- initial feedback on potential zoning changes
- June 23 Public Meeting- feedback on goals for rezoning, specific questions & reactions to potential changes

The requested zoning change would modify existing zoning in three primary ways:

1. Building Height limits would increase to 45' within the proposed 25' Colchester Avenue setback and 80' beyond the existing 115' setback.
2. Lot Coverage would be increased from 40% to 60%
3. Required setback from the Colchester Avenue property frontage would be reduced from the existing 115' to 25'. It is important to note that the front property line itself is set back from the existing sidewalk by approximately 15', implying that the proposed setback would permit new buildings no closer than 40' from the existing sidewalk.

Public discussion regarding the proposed amendment has focused on four primary issues:

1. Housing – Roughly half of all June public meeting participants indicated adding on-campus beds was a first or second priority. Generally, meeting participants have expressed support for new on-campus student housing, as well as improvements to existing dorms to attract more students to remain on campus following their two years of mandatory on-campus residence. Beyond the general discussion of housing, specific concerns have been raised regarding the University's ability to house more students on campus, particularly in light of potential future enrollment growth. A frequently-cited concern has been the impact of off-campus student housing patterns to the city's housing supply.
2. Building height and setback – There have been repeated conversations about the proposed reductions to the Colchester Avenue setback, as well as proposed building height limit increases. While many have responded favorably to the proposal and development concepts and precedent images shared by UVM, some have expressed opposition to both taller buildings and reduced setbacks. Additionally, the public and Planning Commission have discussed some desire to redesign the Colchester Avenue frontage to include additional plantings and bike/ped amenities, including wider sidewalks.
3. Non-Residential Uses – Lifestyle and basic commercial amenities are integral to the on-campus residence experience. The discussion regarding non-residential uses has focused primarily on the extent to which such uses shall be contemplated, and whether or not such uses should be open to the general public, or should remain for student, faculty and staff use only.
4. Mobility and Parking – The public discussion regarding transportation has been whether the proposal would impact planned implementation of improvements to Colchester Avenue. Regarding parking, there has been general support for not increasing parking on campus but questions remain about where parking will be accommodated assuming increased on-campus beds.

Staff has identified four key topics for further review:

1. Most Campus Overlays do not apply a limit on housing in order to enable institutions to maximize their anticipated growth within their campus areas.
2. Cafés, small grocery stores, similar business types are limited to existing buildings, or have to be reviewed by the DRB before being permitted in new buildings.
3. DRB review is required for smaller development projects than required in other Institutional and Mixed Use zoning districts.

4. Continued interest in overall growth & development plans for the Institutions and how specific project proposals fit the vision, such as expanded campus planning requirements to complement Parking Management Plan process.